The Qur'an and the Sunnah:
The Time-Space Factor

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INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT
Herndon, Virginia
London

Published 1991 by IIIT
International Institute of Islamic Thought
Headquarters:
555 Grove Street
Herndon, VA. 22070, USA
London Office:
P.O. Box 126
Richmond, Surrey, TW9 2UD, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Al 'Alwāni, Tāhā Jābir
The Qur'an and the Sunnah: the Time-Space Factor
I. Title II. al Dīn Khalīl, Imād

297.1226
ISBN 0-912463-91-0

Occasional Papers Series' Editors
Dr A S al Shaikh-Ali
Rashid Messaoudi

Design by Zafar 'Abbas Malik

Printed in the USA by
International Graphics
4411 41st Street
Brentwood, Maryland, 20722

CONTENTS

The *Occasional Papers* Series 1

Introduction 3

The Qur'an: The Primary Source of Knowledge
Dr Ṭāhā Jābir al 'Alwānī 5

Toward a Proper Reading of the Sunnah
Dr Ṭāhā Jābir al 'Alwānī 27

The Qur'an and Modern Science: Observations on Methodology
Dr 'Imād al Dīn Khalīl 39

Notes 54

About the Authors 57

Publications of the IIIT 59



The *Occasional Papers* Series

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The *Occasional Papers* series, published by the Institute's London Office, covers a number of research papers, articles, and lectures from the Institute's world-wide program as well as from Muslim scholars willing to make contributions. These are presented individually in the form of booklets that can be easily read or referred to. It is hoped that the booklets will reach students, scholars, and specialists as well as major sections of the world's Muslims alike in order to generate a fruitful debate on the vital issue of Islamization, to create an awareness of the intellectual crisis in its various shapes and forms, and to encourage an active role in the proposed course of action and solution. This series is also translated into other languages.

The third work in this series, *The Qur'an and the Sunnah: The Time-Space Factor* includes three papers originally written in Arabic—"The Qur'an: The Primary Source of Knowledge"; "Toward a Proper Reading of the Sunnah", which is an adaptation of Dr al 'Alwāni's introduction to Dr Yūsūf al Qaraḍāwi's *Kayfa Nata'āmal Ma'a al Sunnah al Nabawiyyah* (Methods of Understanding the Sunnah) and "The Qur'an and Modern Science: Observations on Methodology". A different English edition of the latter appeared in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 1, March 1991. The English editions of the three papers were prepared by the Department of Translation/IIIT. We also acknowledge the contribution of Huda Khatab and Yusuf Budd.

The use of Islamic terminology in transliteration is a policy of the IIIT. Some of the terms used are untranslatable, while others are so

important that the Institute felt that familiarity with them is necessary for a better understanding of Islamic issues. These terms have been endnoted once or sometimes explained briefly between brackets. All those which have not yet been accepted in English dictionaries are in italic. As many of these occur more than once, the readers are advised to refer to the endnotes whenever necessary. Moreover word emphasis in bold is the initiative of the editors.

The translation of the Qur'an used in this series is that of Yusuf Ali (Amana Corporation, revised, 1989). However we made changes to it whenever we deemed it necessary for the sake of elucidation and precision of meaning.

IIIT, London
1412/1991

Introduction

For too long now, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, great sources of strength, purity, knowledge and inspiration for the Ummah, have not been adequately tapped. Skirting their peripheries or overdwelling on one or two of their multifarious facets and tributaries has done a disservice to the immense potential of the fountain-head, while denying the Ummah—indeed the whole world—innumerable benefits from them.

Now that the Ummah is increasingly becoming aware of its own problems as well as latent powers, and yearns to revive its leading role in the forging of history and civilization, the issue of drawing on the well-spring becomes more relevant and urgent. Revisiting these two sources is no longer a scholastic, academic, nostalgic, or escapist indulgence, but a great journey of discovery that promises untold rewards.

And like all great journeys of discovery, this one too may be beset by many challenges and possible setbacks. But once the will has steeled itself to the task ahead, and the Great Guide and light of all travellers has bestowed His blessings and grace, there should be no going back empty-handed, empty-souled.

The rewards are indeed immeasurable: the better discernment of human potential and God's plan; the recovery of a balanced, active, and purposeful life; the restoration of dignity, of peace and harmony, not only to the Ummah, but also to the world at large —a world that has suffered long from bogus ideologies and precepts.

Paradoxically, the journey through the resplendent pages of the Qur'an and the Sunnah to a time and place in the past should yield a more mature awareness of the dynamics of social and historical change and of man's role on earth, honing and sharpening the Muslims' capacity to deal with the demands of the present moment and the challenges of the future. The human and relative dimensions involved in the quest should bring us closer to our fellow-Muslims and human beings, but also, at a higher plane—indeed, the highest—nearer to the Creator of all life and all endeavor.

In the first paper of this book, Dr Ṭāhā Jābir al 'Alwānī explains how

the Qur'an—revealed and protected from corruption by Allah (SWT)—is a source of knowledge. A source which reveals its benefits only if **read properly**. Dr al 'Alwānī argues that there are two levels of reading the Qur'an; the first level consists in cultivating spiritual upliftment; the second one urges man, as vicegerent, to study the cosmos for the purpose of positive action on earth. Performing the two readings together and keeping a balance between them are prerequisites for well-being in this world and in the hereafter.

Earlier generations focused essentially on the formal aspects of the Qur'an and the hereafter and the Revelation came to be seen only as a source of fiqh and legislation. Such restrictive reading of the Qur'an curbed for long the enthusiasm to investigate its validity in time and space. This is why Dr al 'Alwānī advocates the need for a new approach that tackles the comprehension of the Qur'an in a holistic way.

Similarly, a **proper** reading of the Sunnah—the subject of Dr al 'Alwānī's second paper—will be conducive to a better understanding of the aims of Muhammad's prophethood and, accordingly, to a rational implementation of the **spirit** of his Sunnah, in accordance with those sensible requirements of the time we live in and of the space we belong to.

For his part Dr 'Imād al Dīn Khalīl tackles the relation between the Qur'an and science, arguing that the Qur'an is not a science textbook, but that science-oriented data abound in it in the form of outright scientific facts or pointers. In his view, the Qur'an expounds a flexible and comprehensive methodology for dealing with these science-oriented data—a methodology that is not subject to the fluctuations of time and space and remains valid in every age and environment.

Suggestions for a new reading of the Qur'an and the Sunnah have been put forward from Islamic and other angles in the recent years. In this book Dr al 'Alwānī and Dr Khalīl, two well-known Muslim thinkers, put forward their views for a proper approach to these sources **from within** the Islamic framework.

The Editors

THE QUR'AN: THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Dr. Ṭāhā Jābir al'Alwānī

Islam, the Final Message, is a statement of mercy, light, guidance and healing for all creatures: "We sent you not, but as a mercy for all created beings" (Qur'an 21:107). This Message and its Book, the Qur'an, will always guide humanity and remain inviolate against distortion and deviation. Allah (SWT)[1] has assured that

> No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it. It is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise (41:42).

The Qur'an is the Book of Allah the Eternal, and was revealed to mankind through Muhammad (ṢAAS)[2], the Seal of the prophets, to be an admonition to all beings. Indeed there is no prophet after Muhammad (ṢAAS), nor any revelation after the Qur'an.

There was a succession of prophetic missions in the times before Muhammad (ṢAAS). Every nation was sent its own special messenger to address it in its own tongue and in the manner befitting it. Invariably, prophets responded to man's needs in the way that was most appropriate to man:

> And there never was a people without a warner having lived among them [in the past] (35:24).

> We sent not a messenger except [to teach] in the language of his [own] people, in order to make [things] clear to them (14:4).

The earlier prophetic missions were accompanied by cosmic signs and physical miracles which aimed to astound man and induce him to accept the message. One prophet, for example, would raise a mountain above his people's heads to shade them, divide the sea so that people could walk along a dry passage between its two halves, cast his stick and it would change into a serpent, or put his hand in his pocket then draw it out and it would be white but unharmed. Another prophet was sent a wondrous she-camel as a sign and a symbol. A third prophet would bring the dead to life and heal the blind and the leper. And when the people rejected their prophets after seeing the signs and miracles, they were afflicted by punishment and ruination. However, Allah (SWT) has honored the Muslim Ummah and preserved it from doom and destruction.

When the pagans of Makkah asked the Prophet (ṢAAS) to cause springs to gush forth for them, or mount a ladder right into the skies,

or have a house adorned with gold, while condemning him for being human, God did not respond to their demands:

> And they say: "What sort of a messenger is this, who eats food and walks through the streets? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to give admonition with him?" or "[why] has not a treasure been bestowed on him", or "why has he [not] a garden for enjoyment?" The wicked say: "You follow none other than a man bewitched" (25:7-8).

> And We have explained to man, in this Qur'an, every kind of similitude: yet the greater part of men refuse [to receive it] except with ingratitude! (17:89).

> They say: "We shall not believe in you, until you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth. Or [until] you have a garden of date trees and vines, and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst, carrying abundant water. Or you cause the sky to fall in pieces, as you say [will happen] against us; or you bring Allah and the angels before [us] face to face. Or you have a house adorned with gold, or you mount a ladder right into the skies. No, we shall not even believe in your mounting until you send down to us a book that we could read." Say: "Glory to my Lord! Am I aught but a man—a messenger? ""What kept men back from belief when Guidance came to them was nothing but this—they said, "Has Allah sent a man [like us] to be [His] messenger?" (17:89-94).

In the same *sūrah* (al Isrā') Allah (SWT) demonstrates His wisdom in not responding to the pagans' demands:

> And We refrain from sending the Signs, only because the men of former generations treated them as false. We sent the she-camel to the Thamud to open their eyes, but they treated her wrongfully. We only send the Signs as warnings [from evil] (17:59).

God also makes it clear to Muhammad (ṢAAS) that the pagans' rejection of the message is not the result of a lack of clear signs and miracles but has been influenced by other factors. The Pharaoh of Egypt and his people were shown indubitable signs and miracles through Prophet Mūsā (AS)[3] yet they responded in the same way as the pagans of Makkah:

> To Mūsâ we did give clear signs. Ask the Children of Israel: When he came to them, Pharaoh said to him: "O Musa, I consider you, indeed, to have been worked upon by sorcery" (17:101).

And Allah (SWT) confirmed to Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS) that the message did not need a prophet other than him, nor a sign and a Book other than the Qur'an:

> And We have distributed the [water] amongst them, in order that they may celebrate [Our] praises, but most men are averse [to aught] but [rank] ingratitude; If We so wished, We could have sent a warner to every centre of population. Therefore listen not to the unbelievers, but strive against them with the utmost strenuousness, with the [Qur'an] (25:50-52).

This Final Message sought to convince people by asking them to read, listen to and understand the Qur'an so that they can believe its message. This would be enough to achieve the desired transformation in the hearts and minds of those who are willing to listen earnestly and witness the Truth. However, the response of the diehards was one of characteristic arrogance and shallowness:

> Yet they say: "Why are not signs sent down to him from his Lord?" Say: "The signs are indeed with Allah; and I am indeed a clear Warner." And is it not enough for them that We have sent down to you the Book which is rehearsed to them? Verily, in it is Mercy and a Reminder to those who believe (29:50-51).

In His wisdom Allah (SWT) has made reading the pivot of this Ummah's life. The first word revealed to Muhammad (ṢAAS) by the archangel Jibrīl was **Iqra'**(read), to which the unlettered Prophet replied: **"I cannot read"**.Then the angel gave him Allah's command:

> Read in the name of your Lord Who created; Created man out of a [mere] clot of congealed blood. Read! And your Lord is Most Bountiful. He Who taught [the use of] the pen. Taught man that which he knew not (96:1-5).

The above *āyāt*[4] which began the process whereby the Prophet (ṢAAS) received Revelation, contain two commands each of which has both a Divine and a human aspect.

The first command is to read, i.e. to receive, understand and proclaim the Revealed Message. In this command the Divine aspect is manifest in the sense that the Qur'an is the Word and Revelation of Allah (SWT) and that it is for Him to reveal it to His Prophet (ṢAAS) so that it can be communicated in complete and accessible form to man who is expected to reflect, remember, understand and continuously learn:

> Be not in haste with the Qur'an before its revelation to you is completed, but say: "O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge" (20:114).
>
> And We have indeed made the Qur'an easy to understand and remember. Then is there any that will receive admonition? (54:17).
>
> Move not your tongue concerning [the Qur'an] to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect it and to promulgate it (75:16-17).

Thus it is for Allah (SWT) to reveal, send down, collect and safeguard, and for humankind to read, learn and teach so that souls can become purified and cleansed. Only then will they become qualified to fulfil their appointed roles as vicegerents and apply the tools put at their disposal for the purpose of building civilization and producing the finest peoples ever evolved for mankind:

> It is He Who has sent amongst the unlettered an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs (62:2).

The second exhortation to read urges humankind to study the cosmos and decipher its affinities and its multifarious components, all ruled by Allah (SWT) and intimating His Oneness. Indeed the Divine aspect is evident in all creation, including the creation of man himself: "[Who] created man out of a [mere] clot of congealed blood" (96:2). The relationships and stages from the clot to man, and between life and death, have their equivalents in all the other signs of the Divine Power at work in the ordered universe. The purpose

behind them all is to prepare man to acquire learning and promote civilization. This is clear evidence of the Mercy of Allah (SWT), whose glory is declared by all voices and tongues: "There is not a thing but that celebrates His praise" (17:44). Another purpose is the realization of the aim of existence and the wisdom of creation:

> He it is Who has produced you from the earth and settled you therein (11:61).
>
> I have only created *jinn* and men that they may worship me (51:56).

The two readings are interconnected and must occur simultaneously and be in the name of Allah (SWT). Moreover, their interconnection will create a correspondence between Allah (SWT) and man and ensures that He accompanies him in his endeavor as vicegerent and in the Hereafter: "And He is with you wheresoever you may be" (57:4). Allah (SWT) is too Bountiful to leave man alone in either of the two situations. Rather, He guides man through his reading:

> Read! And your Lord is Most Bountiful, He Who taught the use of the pen, taught man that which he knew not (96:3-5).

He knows man's weakness, the limits of his potential, the paucity of his knowledge and the relativism of his thought:

> Should He not know—He that created? And He is the One that understands the finest mysteries [and is] well acquainted with them (67:14).
>
> For man was created weak [in flesh] (4:28). Of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, [o men] (17:85).

Thus Allah (SWT) taught Adam (AS) all the names, He taught with the pen and He taught man that which he did not know, in order to enable him to fulfil the first reading. And He made everything subject to him, ordered him to travel through the earth, provided him with all the necessary faculties for observation, contemplation and understanding and disposed the signs for him so that he may undertake the second reading.

Performing the two readings together is a prerequisite for well-being in this world and in the next. Abandoning or neglecting either of the two readings—or upsetting the balance between them—is a turning away from the Message of Allah (SWT). The unfortunate consequences of such an attitude are such as to render this life difficult and hard to live and the Hereafter abode of dire constraint:

> But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment. (20-124).

In such a situation, man will thus be dethroned from his position as vicegerent and witness and placed in a state of subjection and disgrace:

> While those who reject God will enjoy [this world] and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire will be their abode (47:12).
>
> They are like cattle,—nay more misguided: for they are heedless [of warning] (7:179).

Excessive preoccupation with the first reading without paying sufficient attention to the second may result in the reader acquiring a mass of interpretations and reflections which may well be highly beneficial to his perceptions and feelings. At the same time, however, it can lead to a sort of spiritual coma and an absorption in matters unrelated to the needs and functions of his vicegerency and civilizing role. This may be tolerable, even understandable, in a limited, personal context, but it is extremely perilous if it occurs at the broader level of the Ummah or becomes accepted as part of her way of life, since this will lead to the neglect and rejection of the idea of the value of human action. This in turn will lead a person to adopt a distorted view of the meaning of life and the meaning and role of man in his worldly existence—to the extent that he may come to see his very existence here on earth as a burden and strive to be relieved of it with the utmost dispatch, so that he can proceed to the Hereafter.

Some Qur'anic Features

The Qur'an was revealed in separate instalments. Most of these were connected with specific situations and events, in order to prepare people's hearts, minds and souls to accept, understand and

meditate on it at the time of its revelation. People would then be able to understand it and fix its words, meanings, guidelines and directives permanently in their consciousness. Then their hearts would be opened to receive it, their minds would comprehend it and their souls would be uplifted by it. The whole of life would respond to it and be transformed into one of contentment and rectitude.

The Qur'an could thus be a guide, a proof and an authoritative source to the first generation and all later generations:

> [They] say: "Why is not the Qur'an revealed to him all at once? [It is revealed] in this manner that We may strengthen your heart thereby, and we have rehearsed it to you in slow, well-arranged stages, gradually (25:32).
>
> [It is] a Qur'an which We have divided [into parts from time to time], in order that you might recite it to men at intervals: We have revealed it by stages (17:106).

The Qur'an was revealed as a challenge and a miracle that would overwhelm people's hearts and cause their souls to marvel, thus paving the way for them to accept the message and respond to it with all their being.

The Qur'an contains basic conceptions and general rules, guidance and advice valid for all human beings in every place and time and every realm of life. If it had dealt with minor details and issues relevant to the period of Revelation, it would not have acquired this unique quality of time-space universality, and later generations would have found in it a great deal of contradictions and inconsistency. The specific issues that are dealt with in fine details are essentially the same objectives and rules applicable in every time-space situation and relate to *'ibāda* (worship), inheritance and histories of earlier peoples and nations. And the Creator (SWT) pledged to safeguard the Qur'an when He said:

> We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption] (15: 9).

The purpose behind the command to preserve the Qur'an in its original language (and the prohibition on transmitting it in Arabic according to meaning or by paraphrase) was to ensure that the Book

remained able to establish the way of life that Allah (SWT) wished for mankind. There is profound wisdom in the fact that millions of Muslims read and recite it in its exact original words and in the form that it was revealed, since this enables it to remain the foundation on which all Muslims agree at all times and in all places—however much their paths and inclinations might diverge. Hence the Prophet (ṢAAS) and the leading *fuqahā'*[5] who followed him were determined that every letter of the Qur'an should be first fixed in men's minds and hearts, and then transcribed. This same wisdom may have been behind the many traditions from the companions of the Prophet (ṢAAS) reported by the *tābi'ūn* (the generation after the Companions) which prohibited the transcription of anything other than (or with) the Qur'an. All other things are related to it in a practical application—and understanding at the highest level—of its teachings. This is a situation that has never occurred with any other text—religious or otherwise.

As to the meanings of the Qur'an, the Prophet (ṢAAS) had the knowledge to give *tafsīr* (exegesis) of every *āyah*. However, he did not do so. It is narrated that 'Aisha (RAA) said: "The Prophet of Allah only gave interpretations of a few *āyāt* from the Qur'an, which were taught to him by Jibril." These *āyāt* deal with matters related to *al ghayb* (the Unseen), together with some other questions that can only be understood through Revelation. Consequently schools of *tafsīr* proliferated and over the centuries Muslim intellects roamed through the Qur'an along many different routes. Some were successful, others were not. Concerning the Prophet's Companions who witnessed the Revelation while it was being sent down and knew the reasons for revealing, abrogating and abrogated[6] *ayat* as well as the factors linking the *āyāt* to real events, so much has been said that Imam al Ghazali and Imam al Qurtubi remarked:

> It would be incorrect to assume that everything said about *tafsīr* by the Companions actually came from the Prophet (ṢAAS) for two reasons. One is that it is only established that the Prophet (ṢAAS) gave *tafsīr* of a few *āyāt* . . . This was also 'Aisha's view. The other is that they themselves differ in their *tafsīr* on various points that cannot be reconciled and cannot all have come from the Prophet of Allah (ṢAAS)—even though some may have done so[7].

Implied here is the contention that the intellect should not be constrained by a limited understanding of the Qur'an that "imprisons"

its meanings in a particular period or tie it to a given generation.

Indeed, one of the most effective ways of bringing a Muslim nearer to his Lord is for him to read the Qur'an and contemplate constantly on its *āyāt* and their meanings. Conversely, reading or contemplation without understanding is not permissible. The *fuqahā'* are agreed that understanding and contemplation with little reading is better than much recitation without thinking or contemplation. And by contemplation we mean here reciting the *āyah*, reviewing it, dwelling on its meanings in an attempt to know all the possible meanings it contains, and allowing one's thought to wander freely and unhampered through it in order to arrive at the hidden meanings that Allah (SWT) reveals to certain people of intellect and understanding.

As a heavenly Revelation, the Qur'an is the most reliable source for all kinds of knowledge and an authentic guide for scholars in the humanities and social sciences. It contains general scientific pointers and indicators that awaken and guide man's scientific instincts. Unfortunately, however, many Muslims have long been under the impression that the Qur'an is primarily a source for the past history of nations whose stories were told for the purposes of admonition and warning, in addition to being a repository of information about the Hereafter and its Unseen aspects as well as a fount of fiqh[8] rulings.

Moreover, they have only concentrated on its miraculous quality as being the inimitability of its poetic language, style, and literary elegance, representing the highest possible peak that the Arabic language is capable of attaining—a brilliant treatment of language in a manner previously unknown in Arabic style, while remaining within the bounds of expression permitted by the Arabic language. Indeed studies of the Qur'an's miraculous qualities by the earlier generations were almost confined to these three aspects, as works by al Rumani, al Baqillani, al Jurjani, al Qaḍi Ayyad and other scholars show. The Qur'an came to be seen only as a source of fiqh and legislation, which restricted it to between 200 and 500 *āyāt* only. The rest were regarded as solely for the purpose of admonition and warning as well as edification. However, such restrictions, in addition to confining the miracle of the Qur'an purely to the level of rhetoric, curbs the enthusiasm to seek those aspects that are renewable and applicable for every time and place, and which testify to the Qur'an's miraculous nature.

Since we are seeking the path to a decent, contemporary Islamic life, to bring about a revival of Islam, we must be aware

that the fiqh rulings only account for a very small part of the area covered by the Qur'an. We must further realize that Muslims need to use their intellect to understand and meditate on all the *āyāt* of the Qur'an, making it the primary source and basis of all knowledge in the areas of human *fiṭrah* (innate nature) and of social and applied sciences. Indeed, every Muslim with specialist qualifications in any field of knowledge must turn to the Qur'an for inspiration and guidance. A conscious and contemplative reading of the Book of Allah will enable him to amend, add to and reshape his store of knowledge. This will enable Muslims to rebuild the true Ummah of the Qur'an. However, before we can reach this stage we must first achieve a number of things:

To **begin** with studies on the miraculous nature of the Qur'an need to be reviewed, seeking additional characteristics that the modern Muslim can add to those aspects of the Qur'an that are commonly regarded as miraculous. Areas of particular interest may include the effect of the Qur'an on human *fiṭrah*, its ability to create the finest form of human being and the finest form of family in any time or place, and its effect on society and the establishment of nations. Muslim psychologists and sociologists would find this a profitable area to investigate. Likewise, Muslim applied scientists and other scholars can find valuable material in the Qur'an. Muslim thinkers and *'ulamā'* can investigate its miraculous nature in areas of *ahkām* (rulings) and legislation capable of forming a sound basis for a decent human life, as well as systems that are just, easy to understand and practically applicable.

In the **second** stage the aims behind reading and interpreting the Qur'an need to be re-considered. This should go beyond the three aims of acquiring knowledge about earlier peoples and nations, the Hereafter and fiqh rulings. There are indeed also other essential aims, the most important of which may be:

1. To obtain general guidance in human affairs and the sciences that deal with individual and social behavior as well as with *fiṭrah*.

2. To acquire knowledge of the basic rules and guidelines for reforming society as well as its political system—in a manner consistent with its view of both human and social nature—and to endeavor to discover how this can be achieved.

We can classify all the social sciences under these two aims. Thus the Qur'an becomes the reliable reference and moral yardstick for all types of scientists and scholars, a reference whose contents will never become outdated. Specialists in the social and applied sciences, literature, etc. . . will find it a valuable source to consult on a daily basis. This means that a Muslim must treat the Qur'an differently from the way he does at present, that is merely a book that he reads when he wishes to acquire Allah's blessing or find out about certain rulings.

Here we must tackle an important questions regarding two forms of interpretation: *al tafsīr bi al ma'thūr* (exegesis by means of traditions received from the Prophet and his companions) and *al tafsīr bi al ra'i* (exegesis by means of free exercise of the mind). This issue deserves attention because today's *'ulamā'* and scholars will not find most of the time practices and traditions from the Prophet (ṢAAS) and the early Companions to support their conclusions and interpretations. Thus their pronouncements will be based on nothing more substantial than personal opinion. Now the question is: how can *al tafsīr bi al rai* be resorted to when there exist *aḥādith*[9] that clearly prohibit interpreting the Qur'an on the basis of personal opinion. Indeed, many of the Companions and the *tābi'ūn* would abstain from making interpretative pronouncements unless these were supported by the Sunnah. How, then, should we expect a contemporary committed Muslim researcher in any discipline today to apply his/her reason to interpret the *āyāt* of the Qur'an? Although this is a big and delicate question, its answer will become clear if one notes the following:

We have stated that there is a limited volume of *al tafsīr bi al ma'thūr* from the Prophet (ṢAAS). Wisdom would therefore seem to suggest that the Muslim intellect should be allowed to continue with its efforts of contemplation, reflection and deductions in order to understand the *āyāt* of the Qur'an.

Numerous books of interpretation have appeared throughout the ages and interpreters have adopted a wide variety of approaches in their deductions of the meanings of the Qur'an—in the *āyāt* containing rulings as well as others. Fakhr al din al Razi (d. 606 AH) stated that if he wished to produce a camel-load of interpretations on *Sūrat al Fātihah* he would be able to do so. In fact, his *tafsīr* of this *surah* that has come down to us comprises one large volume. Many

'ulamā'—like Ibn 'Aṭiyyah, al Qurṭubī, Ibn al Ṣabbagh and others—could have deduced a meaning from an *āyah* or build tens —even hundreds—of issues for examination on it. In such cases the new issues raised and examined issues related to cosmic laws, civilization patterns, etc. . . which make the Qur'an unique among other revelations—would not have been mentioned earlier or explained by the Prophet (ṢAAS) himself. Nevertheless, other *'ulamā'* and exegetes did not reject this approach to the Qur'an as long as the right conditions for exegesis were met. Under these conditions, interpretation, in the words of al Ṭayyibi

> should be in conformity with the actual words [of the text] and be free from artificiality, affectation, verbosity and prolixity[10].

Therefore the interpretation that was considered *bid'a* (unacceptable innovation)—in the sense intended by the narrated *aḥādīth* prohibiting interpretation by personal opinion—could belong to one of the following categories:

1. Interpretation based on personal opinion without a serious consideration for the genius of the Arabic language, its styles, the aims of the Shari'ah, the question of abrogating and abrogated *āyāt* and without due attention to the reasons underlying the revelation of a specific *āyah* or *āyāt*. This kind of casual interpretation is pure guesswork and contributes nothing to the advancement of Truth.

2. Interpretation which involves thought and contemplation, but of a defective kind because of failure by the aspiring interpreter to take into account all the factors connected to the *āyah*. In this case the exegete draws his conclusions from the apparent meaning of the words—or even an aspect of this meaning—and taken this to be the only meaning intended.

3. The last category is when the interpreter is a follower of a particular school of thought, schism or tendency which causes him to interpret certain *āyāt* of the Qur'an to suit the views of his trend without taking linguistic meanings and/or the circumstances of revelation into consideration. For example the Bayaniah group interpret the *āyah* "this is a *bayān* [a plain statement] to men" (3:138) as referring to their leader Bayan bin Sam'an al Timīmī who was killed in 119 AH. The Qadyaniyāh interpret "giving glad tidings of an apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad" (61:6) as referring to Ghulām Aḥmad Qadyanī. The

Baṭiniya claim that the Qur'an has an outward and a hidden meaning, the outward meaning being the one understood by Muslims, while the hidden one provides support for their own collected superstitions derived from bygone philosophies, ancient religious beliefs, or the delusions of their various leaders. To prevent anyone from refuting them they attribute all their nonsensical claims to "hidden meanings" in the Qur'an. Leading scholars of the Ummah have nevertheless been able to refute this tendency and expose its evil aims.

Then there exist what are called "signs"—also known today as "symbolism". For example an *āyah* might be understood as having a symbolic meaning, that is representing something that does not spring immediately to mind and which is not directly conveyed by the language. For example consider the following:

> And who is more unjust than he who forbids that in the *masājid* [places for worship usually meaning 'mosques'] of Allah, Allah's name should be celebrated?—whose zeal is [in fact] to ruin them? (2:114)

Here some may claim that *masājid* might be interpreted as meaning "hearts" since hearts are the locations of subjection to Allah (SWT). This is a kind of interpretation by opinion in which the meaning is totally unsupported by linguistic factors.

However, there are three methods of interpretation which may be considered acceptable:

First : Restricting it to the understanding of the obvious meanings of the words.

Second: Deducing concepts implied by the obvious meanings of the words. These would be arrived at by capable interpreters after careful thinking, and would be based on linguistic considerations in conjunction with usage and would not be estranged from the aims and purpose of the Qur'an.

Third : When the interpreter makes use of the intellectual, scientific and cultural resources of his own time and applies them to the *āyāt* to see how compatible they are with the pointers of the Qur'an. He can then decide how these disciplines can be rectified in the light of the meanings indicated in the *āyah*: "And he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit

overflowing; but none will grasp the Message but men of understanding" (2:269).

When a modern Muslim economist considers the words of Allah (SWT): "In order that it may not make a circuit between the wealthy among you" (59:7), and then puts forward an idea never previously raised by Muslim scholars regarding the formation and distribution of wealth, and the way in which this can best be done for the public good, he should not be opposed on the grounds that his statement has never been made before and does not have the backing of Hadith. However, the *uṣūliyūn*[11] would maintain that it is not permissible to deduce a meaning outside the **original** (hence *aṣlī*) comprehension of the Arabs at the time of revelation. Their position, too, is based on much thought but is open for discussion.

Al Shātibi, the author of *Al Muwāfaqāt* says:

> When something from the "illiterate's Shari'ah" (*ummiyyat al sharī'ah*) [designed for and can be understood by illiterate people] is accepted as applying to its people—the Arabs that is—rules are built on it. One consequence of this is that many people have gone too far in invoking the Qur'an in that they have extended its scope to include all the natural sciences, known to contemporary and earlier generations in addition to linguistics, logic, semantics etc. But this does not tally with earlier practices. The venerable forefathers were the best versed in the Qur'an, its sciences and contents; yet they were never heard to pronounce on anything apart from proven commandments and precepts related to the Hereafter. Yes, the Qur'an encompasses sciences which the Arabs knew and were familiar with, though in a manner which astounds men of understanding and cannot be grasped by the more powerful intellects.[12]

Al Shātibi's remarks are based on the assumption that the Qur'an is no more than a source of legislation and that it is a Message to an illiterate nation—the Arabs. Hence Qur'anic concepts and style are determined by the Arabs own ability to understand. Many people consider this attitude to be one of this venerable *uṣūlī*'s most serious errors since the Qur'an was revealed as a Book of Guidance to the whole world in every time and place. The Arabic language, with its breadth and richness, is an apt vehicle for carrying

its meanings. This does not mean, however, that the Arab mind is the sole authority on all these meanings—linguistic or otherwise.

In addition, the Qur'an contains much that the Arabs did not previously know or understand and which would not be possible to list in such a short study. Allah says:

> Such are the stories of the Unseen, which We have revealed unto thee: Before this, neither you nor your people knew them (11:49).

The Arabs at the time of revelation were addressed in a way that they were able to understand. Later, understanding broadened and new circumstances and influences revealed in the text a number of additional meanings which were not constrained by language limitations. This, in fact, is an important aspect of the Qur'an's miraculous nature; that is, that through the ages a single text—properly understood and containing the same words and letters—should be able to respond to different needs. A hadith narrated by al Tirmidhi on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (RA) states: "The wonders of the Qur'an never cease." To say that it is not permissible to go beyond the linguistic meanings conveyed by the text is tantamount to asserting that the Qur'an's wonders are finite and thus bound by time and space. The fact that the forebears did not mention a particular thing with regard to certain *āyah* or *āyāt* does not mean that it is forbidden to interpret them; this simply means that their interpretation focused on areas in which they were experts and in which interpretation was needed. It clearly does not mean that others are forbidden to explore areas that they themselves did not explore.

The statements and assertions on this issue point to the fact that the relationship between the Qur'an and the different sciences exists at different levels:

1. There are sciences which are taken from the Qur'an. These included *tawḥīd*[13], *tashrī'* (legislation) and *uṣūl* (sources of jurisprudence).

2. Other sciences that are dependent on it. This is the case of language sciences and *balāghah* (rhetoric).

3. There exist sciences indicated in it, which help in understanding it and increasing faith in it. This category would include many

of the humanities and social sciences as well as some astronomical and applied sciences.

4. Finally, there are sciences that bear no relation to it whatsoever.

It is imperative, therefore, that energies be galvanized to reform the methodologies of Islamic thought and rebuild the Islamic cultural system through the establishment of up-to-date Islamic social sciences and humanities. Throughout, the aim should be to find the best possible way of relating such disciplines to the Qur'an and the Sunnah[14] of the Prophet (ṢAAS) in accordance with a specific plan that could be based on four principles.

The **first** and most important of these principles should be to restore the Qur'an to the Islamic cultural scene, end the division between it and the Muslim mind and make it the contemporary Muslim's prime source of knowledge—just as it was in the past when our ancestors used to consult it to obtain sound, precise knowledge about life, man, and human institutions.

The **second** principle should be to establish a methodology for understanding the Prophet's Sunnah and using it to build a modern Islamic culture and civilization.

The **third** consists in drawing on the Islamic legacy by applying sound methodologies for understanding it, using it to build our modern culture and learning the necessary lessons from it.

The **fourth** principle is to address contemporary Arab thought by examining ways of understanding, using and benefiting from it.

The strategy to adopt should give appropriate priority to methodologies for understanding and applying the Qur'an. In the course of this task, a **Qur'an File** will need to be created to concentrate on research and studies in:-

1- Ways of understanding the Qur'an and making it the modern Muslim's primary source of culture, knowledge, science and guidance.

2- Issues related to *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl* (interpretation of implied meanings), classification and indexing of the Qur'an, its relationship to the earlier and modern Muslim sciences and the latter's affiliation to it.

3- Other issues which aim to (a) restore the Muslim intellect's ability to apply the Qur'an in a sound manner and (b) reinstate the Qur'an to its rightful position at the centre of modern Muslim culture, knowledge and civilization. Then the Muslim intellect will be reformed and the Qur'an will reassume its role of enlightening it.

The envisaged **Qur'an File** has been inaugurated by Shaykh Muhammad al Ghazali's book *Kayfa Nata 'āmal ma'a al Qur'an*[15] to be followed by seminars and other studies covering the different aspects of the subject.

Denoting a new awareness, the book endeavors to bring the Qur'an into the realistic context of a changing world. Of course, no one should labor under the supposition that the book—one in a series of studies and papers which seek to correct a great many misconceptions about ways of approaching the Qur'an and Islamic subjects—answers all the questions and presents solutions to all the problems. Yet, it is the first step towards establishing a modern Islamic methodological awareness. The thrust should be towards reviewing and evaluating our Islamic legacy from its human perspective.

This study, as well as future works on the subject, do not seek to produce a **break** with the prevailing inherited elements of Islamic thought. On the contrary, they accept those parts of the legacy that can be authenticated and respond positively to all Islamic trends and schools of thought, particularly those that developed before the ages of decadence, backwardness and intellectual stagnation.

This should work towards satisfying the Islamic obligation of making the Qur'an more accessible to intelligent, rational-minded people. The book consists of a number of critical introductions—reflecting the number of different subjects covered—whereas the questions and answers attempt to establish a **Qur'anic awarcness** consistent with the principles of a methodology that does not blindly accept every prevailing notion without criticism or analysis.

Already the Qur'an is a source from which scholars have been able to add to their own specialist fields of knowledge. Equally, it has provided the basis for their comprehension of the world; while their ways of applying it have varied according to the historical development of human thought. A person who reads the Qur'an as an organic whole differs from the selective reader who isolates individual *āyāt* from their respective contexts. Similarly, a person who regards it

as a collection of stories, laws, inducements and threats differs from the reader who sees it as a comprehensive encyclopedia covering cosmic and dynamic existence, the means through which he can acquire an objective perception of the universe, its movements and its relationships across the continuous, ever-changing spectrum of time and space.

The Qur'an defines its own specific qualities and explains that it embodies a complete Revelation which responds to all situations throughout all the ages—past, present and future:

> That which We have revealed to thee of the Book is the Truth, confirming what was [revealed] before it: for Allah is assuredly —with respect to His servants—Well Acquainted and Fully Observant. Then We have given the Book for inheritance to such of Our servants as We have chosen: but there are among them some who wrong their own souls; some who follow a middle course; and some who are, by Allah's leave, foremost in good deeds; that is the highest Grace (35: 31-32).

These *āyāt* clearly show that the Qur'an constantly responds to the situations and needs that arise over the ages in a self-renewing process:

> Furthermore I call to witness the setting of the Stars. And that is indeed a mighty adjuration if you but knew. That this is indeed a Qur'an most honourable. In a Book well-guarded. Which none shall touch but those who are clean (56: 75-79).

The Qur'an, through which Allah (SWT) has related stories of our forefathers, has another unique quality: it is infallible and a sacrosanct Divine book:

> We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption] (15:9).

It is thus an authoritative record for future generations to whose affairs it will be relevant:

> And before you also the apostles We sent were but men, to whom We granted inspiration. If you realize this not, ask of those who possess the message. [We sent them] with clear

> signs and Books; and We have sent down up to you [also] the Message; that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought (16: 43-44).

It is a Book that holds sway against the distortions and corruptions of the earlier books:

> We certainly gave Musa the book aforetime; but disputes arose therein. Had it not been for a Word that went forth before from your Lord, [their differences] would have been settled between them; but they remained in suspicious disquieting doubt thereon (41:45).

Furthermore, the Qur'an has many other qualities. We can discern them in its organic, methodological unity, particularly after the Book was arranged so that the sequence of its *āyāt* was no longer dictated by the period of revelation (a time when they were fragmented and limited by the specific occasions on which they were revealed). These qualities can also be discerned in the fact that the Qur'an is divinely preserved, and that it renews its contribution to human affairs by uncovering its treasures according to the requirements of time: it is the master of time, place and change since it provides a total awareness of the universe, its movements and its relationships. It also contains an awareness of the whole of existence, including knowledge of the words of Allah (SWT). Hence the past, the present, and the future generations are not in any way capable of attaining a comprehensive understanding of the Revelation. Instead, they each take from it as required by the civilizational, social and historical conditions as well as the modes of thinking of their own time.

The importance of Shaikh al Ghazāli's book is not in providing a new interpretation but in its attempt to free contemporary Islamic thought from a multitude of deficiencies and shortcomings before directing it towards the pursuit of knowledge and sound methodology. This is to be achieved in an Islamic society which we do not claim has already absorbed all the new changes and developments that are taking place in the world, but which has begun to do so. In any case, the concept of universalism in thought and aim is an Islamic quality. It was Islam that established the first world-wide religious movement when it described the Prophet (ṢAAS) as the

Seal of the prophets and the Qur'an as the Seal and Master of the Divine books. Moreover, by extending its realm from the Atlantic ocean in the West to the Indian ocean in the East, Islamic civilization became the first civilization to overcome the dichotomy between East and West and unite civilizations and races across the central part of the ancient world.

Universalism is deeply ingrained in our Islamic structure; hence it is incumbent upon us to consider the crises of world civilization and the solution offered by Islam, with a methodological awareness which puts the achievements of contemporary human thought into a single context and demonstrates Islam's supremacy over the whole of man's history, despite the fact that the text of the Qur'an has never been altered or modernized.

Here it is worthwhile to touch upon the requirments of a **contemporary methodological awareness**. The latter cannot be achieved by simply belonging to a certain age or time while neglecting or ignoring the physical surroundings. Growth and development are not just the accumulation of contemporary achievements and the grafting of large numbers of the latest innovations to the structure of the old social system, but are a qualitative change in a society's economic, social and ideational structure. This requires a new approach to the Qur'an and a fresh awareness to meet the new reality. The concept of a contemporary society does not mean the continuation of the old society and its thought in the context of future times. On the contrary, it refers to the historical changes that a society must have undergone in order to qualify for the designation **contemporary**. These changes will enable society to rediscover itself, which for us also means rediscovering the Qur'an within the framework of this changing world.

Considered from this angle it will be clear that many of our Arab and Islamic societies see themselves as contemporary in the sense that they are here in the present time. However, they do not actually live in a **contemporary** situation; they do not possess the present worldwide cultural awareness with its critical, analytical mentality and its aspirations to acquire methodical knowledge and solve today's problems. Arab and Islamic societies have a tendency to cling to their past and their traditional thought while concurrently existing in the modern international age. This dichotomy has given them a **feeling of contemporaneity** combined with an inability to

respond to the situation that would enable them to attain contemporary universal awareness. Hence we find that some intellectual leaders in these societies are still producing material based on traditional thought and are attempting to recreate the past within the present without exploring the nature of world historical and social change. They are content to develop the themes of our righteous forebears (RAA) in terms of the ijtihad[16] that the latter practised in their age and applied to their issues. At the same time, such intellectual leaders ignore the historical difference between the two periods and fail to see the need for ijtihad in and for modern age. Instead of being models of ijtihad, the righteous forebears have become models to be imitated.

We need to break this mould, and attempt to identify the historical developments that have obstructed the advancement of fiqh in its wide sense which covers political and constitutional laws as well as that of economic and international relations. We need to define the way in which these historical developments have affected the positions of the *a'immah*[17] and their commitment to the branches of fiqh as *al muhaddithūn*[18] were committed to the Sunnah issues in matters related to hadith transmission and *sanad.*[19]

Such historical overview may help restore fiqh to its rightful position from which history has excluded it, while exposing the conflicts—such as the dichotomy between the authority and the *'ulamā'*, fiqh and Sufism as well as between those who studied the Qur'an without any reference to the Sunnah and those who studied the Sunnah without any reference to the Qur'an. Such conflicts should not have occurred under the Islamic system since there already exists—by Allah's grace—a single focal point for all the Ummah's Islamic activities and trends, namely one supreme, contradiction-free Qur'an. This should make possible a meeting of Divine Will and human effort for the Qur'an to assume fully its role of creating a complete and balanced civilization whose benefits will be shared by Muslims and all beings:

> And We have sent down to you the Book explaining all things, a Guide, a Mercy and glad tidings [to believers] (16:89).

TOWARD A PROPER READING OF THE SUNNAH

Dr. Ṭāhā Jābir al'Alwānī

From the beginning of Islam, the Sunnah has been invoked and interpreted in accordance with a framework of rules known to scholars and *mujtahidūn*[20]. Its authority has been second to that of the Qur'an. In fact both are inseperable as the Sunnah explains and clarifies the Qur'an and—most importantly—applies its teachings and methodology.

Hence the authority of the Sunnah is an essential part of Islam—a fact never disputed by any of the early Muslims. Among later generations, however, there were people with little knowledge and understanding who could not differentiate between the Prophet's Sunnah as preserved in authentic and reliable *aḥādīth*, and chronicles and anecdotes about earlier times. They did not know to what extent such historical or anecdotal reports could be regarded as authoritative; how valuable they were as a means of increasing man's knowledge; or whether they were still to be regarded as authoritative even when they were contradicted by rational thought or tangible evidence. These ill-informed people imagined that the discussion of this methodological and philosophical matter was a dispute concerning the Sunnah itself. They considered the *sunan* (norms and practices) to be related accounts, and the accounts to be mere reports and, therefore, most of the dispute centered on the reports. They failed to see the tremendous difference between the Sunnah as examples and guidelines set by the Prophet (ṢAAS), and the ways in which it was transmitted. Furthermore, they did not see the differences between the methods of reporting the Prophet's actions, deeds, and sayings on the one hand and the reporting about other people, on the other. The result of this lamentable confusion is that the dispute turned into one concerning the authority of the Sunnah itself—a contention which occupied inordinate space in books devoted to the studies of *uṣūl* and Hadith. The energy so used could have been invested in the study of the correct methodology for understanding the Sunnah, interpreting it and deriving lessons from it, thus enabling Muslims in every place and age to organize their thinking and way of life on the basis of its teachings.

Those unnecessary and deliberate quibbles regarding the authority of the reports in general—and of *aḥād*[21] in particular— had other negative, very serious and damaging effects: they deepened the differences and polemics between Muslims, and cast their shadow on research and Islamic studies in this field, which reduced many works to abstract discussions that had no positive, intellectual or

practical impact. Controversies, like those concerning the status Sunnah in relation to the Qur'an and the Sunnah's abrogation of the latter and vice versa raged on to involve Muslims in unnecessary lengthy and repetitive criticism and checking over the authenticity of historical reports, narrators and chains of authority. If one were to look at the limited number of works devoted to the methodologies of studying, analyzing and understanding the texts, and of presenting the *aḥādīth* in relation to time-space, environment and reality, then compare them to the stupendous efforts and numerous volumes devoted to the study cf *asānīd*, one would realize the origin and nature of subsequent problems and confusion.

Likewise, a great deal of energy went into producing undoubtedly valuable works in the field of legislation. Such works could have met the Ummah's needs more adequately had they covered all aspects of the Sunnah and not dealt only with the legislative aspects.

Because the Sunnah as a whole represents the stage of guidance through the implementation of the Qur'an's methodology in a historical and geographical context characterized by particular ideological, economic and social circumstances, the study of methodologies of understanding the Sunnah is considered to be one of the most important and necessary aspects of the studies of *uṣūl* and Hadith. This was the period when Islam was comprehensively put into practice, when the Qur'an itself played a leading role in translating the ideals of Islam into reality and in making this period of history an era which posterity could refer to and strive to emulate. Thus, the Sunnah represents the highest, most precise, best and truest form of implementing Allah's message. It is a realistic, learned, and all-rounded embodiment of the Qur'an's methodology. This was probably behind the Creator's wisdom to preserve the Qur'an in the form in which it was revealed and safeguard it against any corruption. The Prophet (ṢAAS) himself showed a strong determination to preserve every single letter of the Qur'an and adhere to every single one of its vowels and pauses. Hence the continuous warning that every letter of the Qur'an should be transmitted in the form in which it was revealed, and the prohibition that any *āyāt* should be transmitted in a paraphrased form.

This was not the case with the Sunnah. Although the Sunnah was preserved, the above restrictions were not imposed on it. Moreover, the Prophet (ṢAAS) did not have it written down as was the case with the Qur'an. Nor did he review it with Jibril as he reviewed

the Qur'an with him. The reason for this difference of approach was to enable the Sunnah to remain a practical experience at the highest level of human capability as practised by the Prophet (ṢAAS) who responded to the Qur'an in a comprehensive and all-embracing manner. Indeed he applied and embodied its methodology in all daily life matters and worldly activity: when preaching, teaching, making changes around him, prohibiting, enjoining, advising, counselling, guiding, judging, giving *fatāwā*[22], instructing, disciplining, fighting, peacemaking, concluding treaties, selling, buying, exchanging messages, marrying, divorcing, building, demolishing, travelling . . .

The Quran's methodology followed and monitored the Prophet's actions. Many of its *āyāt* evaluated the manner in which this methodology was applied, and—when necessary—criticized, analyzed, corrected and directed it. This was because the application process is bound and conditioned by human limitations as well as by the time-space factor. Hence Allah said: "Remain, then, as conscious of Allah as you can".

When a person other than the Prophet (ṢAAS) applies the Quran's methodology, there is a greater need for the application to be evaluated in comparison with the Prophet's own application of it because people other than the Prophet (ṢAAS) himself are more susceptible to subjective personal impulse and spontaneous influences. Thus, in the case of worship, for instance, people used to follow the Prophet's example only. They were required to follow his example rather than imitate him, because following an example is a conscious activity involving the intellect, which requires a general awareness of all factors surrounding the example to be followed.

The International Institute of Islamic Thought has always considered the understanding of the Sunnah, its comprehensive, exhaustive analysis and the proper approach to using it as a source of Islamic knowledge and culture to be among the most important matters of concern to Muslim scholars today. This is especially so since defining and explaining the bases and sources of Islam—as well as methods of understanding them—are among the fundamental prerequisites for the reconstruction of the Ummah's knowledge, culture and civilization. To achieve this goal, the Institute decided to undertake several actions:

Firsly, it aimed to shift the focus of *uṣūl* and hadith studies from

matters which have already been conclusively dealt with to matters which are still unresolved and in need of solutions. In this respect the Institute considers the question of the authority of the Sunnah to have been conclusively dealt with as no Muslim who believes in Allah and His Messenger can afford to deny this authority. The Institute has published *Ḥujjiyat al Sunnah* (The legal Authoritativeness of the Sunnah) by the leading contemporary *uṣūl* specialist shaikh 'Abd al Ghani Abd al Khaliq. It is a valuable academic study on this subject, one of the most important and comprehensive works in the field, and one which the Institute regards as **the final** word on the matter.

In the meantime, the Institute has endeavored to draw the attention of researchers in this field to the use of information technology in making the Sunnah more accessible to scholars and researchers in various subjects. The Institute has already lent its support to many scholars working towards this aim.

Furthermore, the Institute concerned itself with the classification of the Sunnah according to subject, and using any appropriate scientific methodologies likely to help us to achieve our aim of making the Sunnah a source of knowledge in the social sciences, instead of it being a source limited to fiqh alone.

Finally, the Institute initiated action to invite prominent scholars to write works concerning various aspects of the Sunnah and its major role in reconstructing Islamic civilization. Eminent scholar Shaikh Muhammad al Ghazāli already made a well-received contribution: *Al Sunnah Bayna Ahl al Fiqh wa Ahl al Hadith* (The Sunnah between Fiqh Experts and Hadith Specialists)[23]. The book suggests methods of understanding the Sunnah and shows the differences between those who are concerned with the structure of the *asānīd* and reports, and those whose interest lies in understanding the Sunnah and deriving lessons from it. This distinguished scholar is, in the opinion of the Institute, too experienced and knowledgeable for anyone to dictate to him how to write or to check his books publication. However, much criticism was made about some of the details he gave and examples he used in his book; so much so that the main message of the book was almost drowned by the clamour about these minor details.

The book was aimed primarily at those people who do not have a basic knowledge of Shari'ah and research methodology, and whose knowledge of history, *sīrah*[24], fiqh and Arabic is not adequate enough to

enable them to understand the hadith correctly. Many people do come across hadith literature and read through it without understanding its nature or the reasons behind the Prophet's words or deeds reported in it, or without grasping the general context of the *aḥādīth*. Their understanding is therefore deficient and confused, and leads them to develop and adopt a distorted knowledge of hadith which they pass on to people at large. Such people go as far as claiming that the Sunnah takes precedence over the Qur'an and can abrogate it. Moreover, if they are confronted with more authentic *aḥādīth* which contradict the ones they invoke in their argument, they do not understand the nature of the contradiction, the ways of evaluating such *aḥādīth* or even the correct methods and rules of understanding the *aḥādīth* put before them.

The book was also aimed at scholars and researchers involved in the study of the Sunnah, advising them to devote at least some of their attention to proper methods of understanding it; for there is no Sunnah without proper understanding, and there can be no fiqh, Islamic civilization or true knowledge without Sunnah.

When the Institute became aware of the confusion surrounding the message of Shaikh al Ghazāli's book, it requested Dr Yūsuf al Qaradāwi to prepare two detailed books, one on **the methods of understanding the Sunnah** and the other on **the Sunnah as a source of knowledge**. The first has already been published by the Institute under the title: *Kayfa Nata'āmal Ma'a al Sunnah al Nabawiyyah* (Methods of Understanding the Sunnah); and the second will come out in the future—in sha' Allah[25].

In the endeavor to restore the Sunnah to its positive and active role in shaping contemporary Islamic life, the greatest need seems to be for Islamic higher education to include the methodological approach to the Sunnah in their syllabi of hadith studies, instead of teaching topics which have already been dealt with conclusively.

It is hoped that Muslims will increasingly take a greater interest in understanding the Sunnah. They need to attain and disseminate a better appreciation of the rules and conditions of such understanding, and to develop a keen interest in knowing the reasons why misunderstanding over the Sunnah has arisen. They need to understand why overlapping issues have led to a crisis in understanding and how this crisis helped to involve scholastic theology in the debate on the authority of the Sunnah.

Three questions require in-depth research if a comprehensive, methodological approach to the understanding of the Sunnah is to be established:

a) The Conditions for Understanding.

If the problem with the Sunnah is a question of understanding it correctly, then what are the factors of differences and confusion over it at different times in history? What are the qualities and qualifications required for its proper study and understanding? Is commitment to Islam a prerequisite for understanding? How can one overcome one's lack of comprehensive insight? How can we deal with the crisis decisively and conclusively? How can we resolve the question of overlapping issues, which generated confusion and which, in turn, in the opinion of many researchers, led to the debate on the authority of part—if not all—of the Sunnah? A debate which became an excuse for arguments and bragging, although Islamic history shows this had never been an issue among earlier Muslims!

b) Differences and Divisions.

How and why did the Ummah become divided into different sects and groups? How have differences in the interpretation, understanding and transmission of the Sunnah and over its authority contributed to the emergence of these various groups? How has the Sunnah been used as a weapon between the various Islamic sects and groups? How did the phenomena of hadith fabrication, of incomplete understanding and of the use of the Sunnah for deriving legislation only arise? What effect did these phenomena have on the emergence of various groups and what is their connection with the appearance of specialized technical questions in the study of *aḥādīth* and analysis of their chains of narrators? How did all these matters become involved in Sunnah studies discussed earlier by *uṣūl* scholars and scholastic theologians? Such matters include the authority of the Sunnah, its status in relation to the Qur'an, its abrogation of certain *āyāt*, its explanation and delimitation of a general statement in the Qur'an, the Prophet's ijtihad, the argument over it as well as the appraisal of the 'spoken Sunnah' and certain passages of the Qur'an dealing with many of these issues.

What effect have these phenomena had on the Muslim mind from the intellectual and educational points of view? What is the historical contexts which brought about these issues? What is their intellectual

significance, and what impact have they had hitherto? What are the best ways to deal with them in modern Sunnah studies and to draw up syllabi for such studies? How can lessons be drawn from these issues so as to attain the best vision likely to unite the Muslims and to motivate the Ummah to rebuild its civilization?

c) The Time-Space Factor in Understanding the Sunnah.

The *uṣūliyūn*, like the first generation of Muslims, recognized the particular historical and geographical context of the Prophet's deeds and words, the human nature of his experience. They, therefore, set rules for taking these factors into account. Is it possible for the specialists to draw up some guidelines to help others take these factors into account when reading various types of *aḥādīth*? In that case, what is the procedure to be followed and the role of modern Hadith studies in defining these guidelines?

Knowledge of the essential differences between the minor matters dealt with by the *faqīh*, the intellectual matters dealt with by the thinker, the philosopher and the *mutakallim* (scholastic theologian) on the one hand, and the social phenomena dealt with by the social scientist on the other hand, requires a variety of ways as well as a range of methodologies for understanding and dealing with the Sunnah. A hadith dealing with a minor issue which is part of the *faqih*'s field is different from a hadith dealing with a general social phenomenon the interpretation of which must take into account all the aspects of that phenomenon which the social scientist would examine in his analysis of it. How can we rid ourselves of the chronic division of the Ummah which misuses the same hadith to support opposing ideas and how to do away with the fanatical adherence of each group to its own beliefs? How can we restore the bases of a holistic view of Islamic thought and thus escape from this vicious circle, especially now that it has become easier to collect the Sunnah and invite scholars to carry out academic research, hold debates and establish joint institutions for this purpose?

The Role of the Sunnah in Tackling the Problems of the Ummah

The Islamic world in general, and the Arab world in particular, suffers many shortcomings which have contributed to the contemporary crisis of Islamic thought. This crisis manifests

itself in different forms the most significant of which are:

a) The disintegration of ties between the various sections of the Ummah; the prevalence of the spirit of conflict in the intellectual, social and sectarian, as well as political aspects; the revival of ideologies which divide the Ummah or the invention of such ideologies when they do not exist.

b) The collapse of other social and regional stabilizing factors; the prevalence of selfish, partisan and factional attitudes, of anxiety about the future and hopelessness concerning the present, of apathy and lack of enthusiasm for any positive action and the predominance of attitudes based on reaction to events—an attitude which precludes debate in favor of conflict, while leaving the initiative to others.

c) The lack of objective awareness of the real nature of the Ummah's social problems and their connection with history. The rise of the shallow, narrow, emotional and impulsive opinions over the holistic, analytical viewpoints; and the Muslim mind's readiness at this time in history to accept anything, without scrutiny or for the wrong reasons. There is also a host of other negative phenomena which are too numerous to list in detail.

So how can we employ the Sunnah so that it will once again help govern the Ummah's affairs and promote the soundness of mind and the clarity of vision necessary to produce a convincing answer to the Ummah's problems? How can it be used to motivate the Muslims to act and to mobilize and rally their social reserves around the Islamic aims which will bring life and hope to the Ummah, while inspiring the latter to seek the cultural alternative and practical social and intellectual programme which will restore its identity and strengthen its feeling of belonging to a deeply-rooted and noble civilization and history?

The Danger of Too-Literal an Interpretation of the Sunnah

At the time of the Prophet (ṢAAS), people implemented the Sunnah in their daily life in all its aspects, and by doing so they understood the Qur'an clearly and completely. The influence of this Qur'anic miracle became apparent in the creation of an

ummatan wasatan (community of the middle way), that is a witness and a guide to others, one endowed with perfect goodness and the ability to meet and overcome any challenge. With the passage of time, however, the people's proper understanding of the Sunnah declined whereas the dictionary-based culture began to take precedence over the other tools of interpretation until it became, for some, the only means possible. This gave rise to a literal approach which relied heavily on dictionary-oriented interpretation. So much so that such dictionary-based trend did not take into account the time-space factor, thus lending strength to the factors which impeded the renaissance of the Ummah by contributing to the confusion, argumentation and conflict. They also were instrumental in reducing Islam to a collection of antiquated images, forming many of their conclusions on unlikely foundations, and thinking that the exact circumstances which brought about a hadith could be repeated many times—which is impossible in real life. How then can modern Sunnah specialists deal with these matters and protect the Muslim mind from their dangers? How can the Muslim mind be rescued from the effects of those who nearly succeeded in emptying the Islamic message of its content and doing away with all-embracing cultural and civilizational role? Admittedly, such people reduced Islam to no more than an individual and behavioral matter, and restricted its vision and frame of reference to minor, superficial concepts, and ritualistic adherence to the letter of the religion. Such an approach is not conducive to the advent of a truly Islamic society, the unity of the people or the building of civilization.

The Role of the Sunnah in the Ummah's Revival

Undoubtedly, our Ummah is today in acute need of a comprehensive plan for renaissance which will restore it to its position of a community of the middle way as a vanguard for humanity. This cannot be achieved unless Muslim societies meet the necessary prerequisites, first of which is the establishment of an intellectual and cultural blueprint for Islamic renaissance.

The Ummah today draws on two cultures: the inherited culture which bears the characteristics of the historical era and environment in which it was formed, and an alien imported culture. The Muslim mind is passive towards these two cultures—content to consume their products and unable to make any original contribution of its own.

Connecting the aims and means of social change to the Ummah's Islamic way of life will greatly help to mobilize the Muslim World's energies so as to bring about the cultural and intellectual transformation it needs, and will assist the Ummah to shoulder this heavy burden.

To emerge from the current crisis of Islamic thought and attain the awareness and vigor necessary for meeting contemporary challenges and restoring the Ummah's cultural and intellectual position of yore, we must revisit the immutable sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and study them again in details, carefully and with a contemporary Islamic outlook. Such an outlook needs to be clear-sighted and comprehensive enough to take into account all the influencing factors and dimensions; it has to define goals, explain the basic principles and devise the methods capable of meeting pressing demands and reconstructing the constituents on which the Ummah is founded.

The Qur'an provided our forefathers with an excellent intellectual framework which enabled them to understand, interpret and analyze the rise of nations and the laws governing the emergence and decline of civilizations. It helped them to examine facts in depth, in a wholly objective fashion. It was a rational approach that consistently and indisputably dealt with realities—as opposed to fantasies. An approach which took into account the dynamics of history, elucidating the internal tensions in societies, how and why they came about, how events can be interpreted, how lessons can be learnt from them and how they can provide pointers to the future and enable appropriate action to be taken before anticipated events should occur.

Conclusion

The Prophet's Sunnah, his way of life as well as that of his close Companions represent the objective, practical embodiment of that intellectual framework. It is only when contemporary Islamic thought addresses the Qur'an with a sound, rational frame of mind in touch with the requirements of our time, seeking a comprehensive methodology capable of organizing and guiding man's life in harmony with the rest of creation, that the solution to the great intellectual crisis will be within reach.

By the same token, a correct reading of the Sunnah and of the aims of the Prophet's implementation of the message of the Qur'an as well

as his making it a vivid reality in the lives of men, will put an end to the darkness of ignorance, hatred, conflict and wasted energies in our Ummah. Only so will contemporary Muslims be able to overcome their self-inflicted disabilities, see through all the intellectual and cultural intricacies of modern man and offer humanity true guidance and welfare based on a correct and comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings. Such understanding should be able to distinguish the immutable principles from the adaptable rules and pinpoints the aims and the means.

THE QUR'AN AND MODERN SCIENCE: OBSERVATIONS ON METHODOLOGY

Dr. Imād al·Dīn Khalīl

Anyone who reads the Qur'an carefully and endeavors to attain a proper understanding of its attitude to science will find out a great number of *āyāt* which cover science in all its aspects. They fall in four categories which correspond to four fields of scientific knowledge. The first category deals with matters related to the reality of science, its scope and aims, which are known as the philosophy of science or as epistemology. The second deals with the methodology of discovering scientific facts. The third concerns the laws that apply in the various fields of science particularly the natural sciences. The fourth permits those laws discovered through experimental methodology to be applied by man, in his capacity as vicegerent of Allah (SWT) on earth, to the task of developing and improving life. This field is known as the applied sciences.

No doubt that there is a very close relationship between each of these categories. Philosophy of science analyses the aims of science, while methodology provides a *modus operandi* for discovering facts; that is, the *sunan* or cosmic patterns and laws that govern the cosmos, the world and life, and organize their movements in time. In their turn, these laws and systems provide man with the formulae which enable him to explore the wondrous structure of creation. Thus, these become the means which man makes use of for the progress and welfare of humankind, means to free himself from the drudgery of day-to-day earthly existence, and become more able to satisfy those spiritual needs which distinguish him from all other creatures. He can thus perform more of the duties required of him in his capacity as vicegerent, and fulfil his role of bringing civilization and well-being to the world.

It is a truism that the Qur'an was not revealed as a science book or any other kind of textbook. It is equally true that some modern thinkers insist on ascribing to its *āyāt* certain scientific meanings and interpretations which were never intended by their Author. In reaction, some other thinkers have gone to the other extreme and insist that the Qur'an has no connection whatsoever with any scientific fact.

What is undeniable, on the other hand, is that, when the Qur'an deals with the scientific message, it applies all the four categories mentioned in a manner that leaves no scope for discussion.

It is self-evident that Qur'anic and scientific data should coincide and correspond (in their general sense, and outside the realm of re-

latívities and variables), and it is obvious that there should be no contradictions or barriers between them. After all, they come from the same source—Allah (SWT), the Originator of the universe and its cosmic laws and systems, the Revealer of the Qur'an, the Maker of man. Moreover, man is **a concerned party** in the law-making and Qur'an-revealing process; that is, he is Allah's vicegerent on earth, the hand that endeavors to build civilization for the sake of Allah (SWT). The Qur'an emphasizes the essential nature of the link between the Qur'anic message and the cosmic laws. For how man cannot perform his role on earth within the framework of the teachings of the Qur'an unless he begins by trying to understand the world and find out about its laws and systems.

Here we should point out that modern science does not reject or cast doubt on religious truth—as was the case in past centuries. It recognizes that it does not have the last word on a subject that is far greater than it appears to be. Having done so, it also affirms —within its limited scope—that human life has no *raison d'être* if it is stripped of that major dimension which extends beyond the bounds of matter and motion. Science has now returned to the situation in which it functions in harmony with religion. This is the great revolution that has taken place in the philosophy of science as a result of recent discoveries, particularly in the natural and nuclear sciences, and in man's understanding of the way the human brain operates. In this respect research has broken—while exploring the core of the atom—the 'material barrier' and revealed the spiritual dimensions underlying the structure and composition of the physical world. Here science and religion meet—anew—in numerous instances[26]. So what do we find if we take a necessarily brief look at the relationship between the four aspects of science and the data contained in the Qur'an[27]?

I) The Philosophy of Science, Its Aims, and Islam's Basic Principles

The philosophy of science is concerned with examining and analyzing the objectives science aims to achieve and their relationship firstly with man's civilizational endeavours, and secondly with man's vision of the cosmos, life and the world in which he lives.

It would appear that scientific research and the experimental methodology it adopts are necessities of Islamic life, not luxuries or

secondary factors. This is because they are intimately linked to the activities of the Ummah, the nature of its mission on earth and its overall beliefs about the cosmos, life, the world and man.

Here, it would perhaps be useful to mention some **basic principles** of the Islamic life and world-view which dictate the use of scientific methodologies, of the laws and systems uncovered by established scientific truths and of the ways in which they are applied. Such an approach plays an important role in strengthening these principles, asserting the fundamental elements of the global Islamic world-view, linking them more practically to the real world and enabling them to make an active contribution to civilization. There are, in our opinion, four basic principles calling for scientific activity:

1) *Istikhlāf* or *Khilāfah*[28]:

Man's carrying of the Divine trust (*amanah*) constitutes his *khilāfah* or vicegerency to God on earth. The principle of *khilāfah* put forward in the Qur'an and the Sunnah is one of those principles which science upholds and enables to become a reality.

The Muslim is Allah's vicegerent on earth so that he can develop it, bring civilization to it, meet its challenges, create the conditions for a want-free, secure life which is more conducive to higher achievements—that is, aspiring towards the Creator.

Man cannot carry out his functions as vicegerent, or obtain sufficient guarantees and assistance to enable him to achieve his objectives of uninterrupted progress, unless he uses scientific research methodologies in order to discover the cosmic *sunan* mentioned earlier. Only then can he 'plug in' to their reserves of energy and achieve a greater harmony between himself and his environment. Without this, the principle of *khilāfah* is no more than a theory or dogma operating in a vacuum.

2) *Tawāzun* (balance):

Tawāzun or balance between man's spiritual and material needs is one of the basic principles of Islamic life and thought. It is an issue that is deeply ingrained in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, where we find that it takes on a number of aspects and forms.

We have long ignored one of the most obviously self-evident facts in

this area, namely that Allah (SWT) has subjected the earth to man in a manner compatible with his role in it. It is a blatant contradiction—totally rejected by Islam—that although Allah (SWT) created man in a particular form and has subjected the earth to him in order for him to satisfy the requirements of his make-up, other heavenly religions proclaim the separation between the spiritual and the material. In so doing, they deviate towards the former, with the result that barriers are erected between the demands of man's make-up and the fruits and benefits of the earth that has been subjected to him.

The fact is that there can be no Islamic life as such without a proper balance between the two sides of man's make-up. However, Islam's objective is to operate within the realm of the real and create a balanced human being capable of action, change and motion; free from tension, deviation or repression. Yet, this balanced vision—which no other school or religion in the world accepts with the same degree of universality and commitment—cannot be implemented in the absence of scientific methodologies, facts and applications.

3) *Taskhīr* (subservience):

This is another basic characteristic of the Islamic vision of the cosmos and life. Here, too, without a shadow of doubt, science is needed before this vision can become reality and realize its noble potential. According to the Islamic view, nature and the universe have been made subservient to man. Allah (SWT) has laid down their laws, systems and capacities in a manner befitting the basic function of man as vicegerent on earth and in accordance with his ability to interact positively and effectively with nature.

In connection with this interaction, Islam aims is to propose a 'middle way' methodology. It informs mankind of the principle that nature is subject to the service of human ends. At the same time, however, it lays down the parameters of interaction between the two sides of man's make-up through the establishment of values, principles and conventions. These are designed to produce the greatest possible degree of innovation and to instil such civilizational qualities as are most compatible with man's ambitions, ethics and status in the cosmos.

If it fails to make use of science's potential—that is, the method-

ologies, facts and applications of science—no Islamic society can ever implement the principle of *taskhīr* and transform it into a historical reality.

4) The Necessary Link Between Creation and the Creator.

Finally, science must be used to establish one of the most important principles of the Islamic world-view in particular and that of religion in general. This is the necessary link between the wondrous system of creation and the existence of the Creator. Science is the tool that reveals and clarifies this link. Many have written about the miracle of creation and many scientists and scholars have spent their lives seeking to arrive at one of the main incontestable truths in the history of science: that is, that creation must have a Creator. This issue has been decisively resolved and there is no scope left for questioning. Since the cosmos is governed in its functioning by organization, precision, harmonious motion and constructive inter-linkage—all resolved by mathematical calculations and scientific formulae, by numerous proofs and by the results of countless scientific experiments, it must originate from a supernatural, all-powerful and directing Will.

Scientific research, therefore, is a necessity of Islamic life as long as it continues to perform the critical function of exploring the secrets of the cosmos, the world and life. Moreover, it leads to the Maker of the universe in the most convincing manner and—as it turns to the Creator—it coincides with the act of worship itself.

II) The Methodology

In this context the Qur'an expounds a methodology for the discovery of the laws of the universe. It is a flexible, comprehensive methodology that is not subject to the fluctuations of time and space since it is strictly a method or a tool for research and exploration. It thus transcends relative changes and remains valid in every age and every environment. The Qur'an exhorts people to have an insight into the reality of their existence and their place in the cosmos. To do this, they are invited to use their senses so as to observe their surroundings from the ground on which they stand to the horizons of the psyche and the cosmos: what a good attitude for man to the higher spheres of *imān*[29]! The Qur'an also assigns the senses a basic responsibility for every step taken by the Muslim in the fields of research, contemplation, knowledge and experience.

The Qur'an went a step further telling man to make use of all his senses to receive unlimited data so that his perceptive power can register, discriminate, accept or reject them with a view to reaching the Truth which underlies the unity of the laws of the cosmos.

The intellect and the senses are all jointly responsible for exploration, examination, inductive reasoning and decision-making. Man will be put to the test on the basis of this responsibility, because he is essentially different from other living creatures. There are numerous *āyāt* in the Qur'an which stress time and again that it is the hearing, the sight and the feeling-in-the-heart (*al fu'ād*) that jointly give human life its value and its uniqueness. If man activates these powers extensively and makes full use of them, he will reach the peak of his scientific and religious superiority; such elevation will make him master of the universe, thus deserving his status as vicegerent of Allah (SWT) on earth. On the other hand, if he deactivates these powers, he will have chosen the meanest status for himself—an inferior status that Allah (SWT) did not predestine for him when He endowed him with hearing, sight and the feeling-in-the-heart.

There are also about fifty other *āyāt* which urge man to activate his intellect. The intellect is Allah-given key for man to penetrate the realm of faith in Him. Further *āyāt* invite man to ponder deeply, perceptively and responsibly upon all the phenomena in the world around him.

Whatever is said about contemplation also applies to acquiring knowledge which is an intellectual step beyond contemplation and the outcome of it. Acquiring knowledge gives man a greater awareness of his surroundings and a deeper perception of the dimensions of his being and relationship with the cosmos. It opens up his perceptions at all times and ensures his readiness to tackle, in a responsible manner, every issue, phenomenon or problem that presents itself to him.

The Qur'an stresses the methods to be followed—proof, argument, intelligent debate—in order for man to arrive at valid results founded on induction, comparison, balance and examination, and supported by the basis of agreed external data as well as the strength of the intellectual and logical powers of those people who have greater competence in this field.

It is highly significant that the Qur'an uses the word *'ilm* (knowledge/science) to indicate (a) the *dīn*[30] that Allah (SWT) taught to His prophets, (b) the *sunan* with which Allah (SWT) enables the universe to function harmoniously, and (c) the great truths which are contained in its *āyāt*. *'Ilm* also occurs as an indication of the revealed religious values.

Thus *'ilm* and *dīn* acquire identical connotations in Qur'anic language. The words of Allah (SWT) teach us this fact and enable us to perceive the broad, inter-linked senses which He wishes *'ilm* and *dīn* to convey rather than the meanings derived from the uninformed opinions and prejudices of the positivists. The various declensions and derivatives of the word *'ilm* occur in more than 750 *āyāt*.

The Qur'an stresses that a completely scientific approach must be adopted in studying the physical and metaphysical phenomena, and declares its categorical rejection of everything that has a negative effect on such an approach: prejudices, uninformed opinions, magic and superstition. Such unscientific practices are all forms of deviation from the true way which the *dīn* requires man to follow, along the straight path, in order to reach his goals. As we all know, straight path is the shortest distance between two points; thus any deviation from it will increase the distance and hardship, and could deflect travellers to the extent that they may never reach their goals. The Qur'an repeatedly asserts a clear and obvious fact, namely that nothing can come of prejudice but worthlessness and blindness, and that the only alternative to truth is error.

III) Facts

The third dimension offered by the Qur'an consists of a mass of facts, and systems in the various fields of science: astronomy, geography, botany, biology, human physiology. . . In this respect, many modern thinkers—or exegetes—adopt one of two conflicting positions. The first position relies entirely on the use of modern scientific data to interpret the Qur'an's *āyāt*, with the resulting methodological errors whereby partial data is applied to produce a general ruling, variable data is used to produce an invariable ruling and relative data is used to produce an absolute ruling. The weakness of this approach is that, if these partial and relative scientific data should change—and this, as the scientists themselves will confirm, is their natural propensity—then the proponent of this position would suffer a form of mental anguish.

While attempting to avoid such a fate, the second position also falls into the trap of erroneous thinking by totally rejecting scientific data.

The nearest attitude to a sound methodology is a middle position which the Qur'an teaches us to adopt in every area of life. We should not allow ourselves to become fully committed to science with its variable data; yet at the same time we should not totally reject every interpretation in which science plays a part.

A capable contemporary exegete of the Qur'an must be able to use his intellect and experience in his own field of specialization in order to understand the nature of the relationship between the two sides of the equation: the Qur'anic *āyāh* and the scientific thesis. In addition, he must make use of certain modern trends in Qur'anic interpretation that have recently been developed. These trends use Qur'anic terminology and imagery to understand its meaning and content—an approach known as *al tafsīr al bayani li al Qur'an*. This method contains objective guarantees, which protect the interpreter from exaggeration or error in his attempts to obtain the intended meanings of words and phrases. This balance between scientific specialization and *al tafsīr al bayani* enables the exegete to strive towards revealing the intended meanings of the scientific *āyāt* in the Qur'an.

There are some scientific facts that have become definitive laws or indisputable, self-evident truths; for example, the role of the winds in producing rain, the role of gravity in the movements of the solar system, the anatomical stages of the foetus, or changes in the ratios of gaseous substances as their distance from the earth's surface increases or decreases. Apart from these, there are also many other facts the scientific nature of which the Arabs were not familiar with at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an. Interpretation of the Qur'anic *āyāt* which deal with and confirm these facts has relied—at least in recent centuries—on self-evident scientific facts and, in doing so, has revealed one of the Qur'an's many miraculous aspects.

There are scientific facts that convey more than one aspect of reality. However, all these aspects exist within a single, flexible framework and it is sometimes useful to cross-reference them to other Qur'anic *āyāt* in order to understand their significance in relation, for example, to other *āyāt* which confirm that the miraculous structure of the heavens is held together and protected from disintegration by a system.

However, theories which are still at the discussion and evaluation stages and—unlike the 'proven' laws and self-evident truths—have not yet been established, and should, therefore, be treated with great caution and not be applied by the exegete to throw light on any aspect of a given *āyāh*.

Where constantly changing scientific data is concerned, it is essential to proceed with care and avoid the possible errors of (a) a complete commitment to, and (b) a complete rejection of the scientific interpretation. A complete commitment to the scientific interpretation will impair proper understanding, awareness, and further investigation at all levels. On the other hand, complete rejection will undermine the ability to understand and erect barriers between modern man and an aspect of the information contained in the Qur'an.

Scientific-oriented data—devised as proofs to lead man to attain belief in Allah (SWT)—are to be found in abundance throughout the Qur'an. Here it is worth noting that not everything propounded by the Qur'an on a scientific topic is intended to be a miracle for the coming generations. Nor was it necessarily unknown at the time of revelation. There are two types of *āyāt*: One type conveys information and directs attention to the excellence of Allah's creation—the cosmos, the world and life. This type presents facts and phenomena that were as well-known at the time of revelation as they have been in every other age. The other type consists of pointers to scientific facts, systems and *sunan* not known at the time of revelation, but which science has revealed over the ages. This is the type that is usually called the scientific miracle and wondrous nature of the Qur'an.

One should also note that the Qur'an does not contain all scientific facts since it is not a science text-book. However, it reveals some facts and provide pointers to a host of others. It creates a psychological climate for researchers, thus leaving man the man freedom to discover a far greater mass of facts for himself. But the Qur'an does underline that man can only follow these discoveries through religious faith and commitment.

IV) Application

When considering the fourth aspect of the relation between the Qur'an and science, one observes that the Qur'an frequently urges man to

make use of scientific facts and discoveries in order to improve life and raise the quality of human civilization at every level. This is a broad, flexible and constant position which calls on man to benefit from the scientific data available everywhere in time and space, and apply them to the civilization of the age in which he lives. If this happens, and if there are developments in the known scientific facts and the state of civilization, then the Qur'an can be seen to appeal effectively to every generation and inspire it to bring about further changes on the basis of new facts and new situations.

Thus, however one looks at this fourth dimension of the relationship between the Qur'an and science, one finds that the Qur'an constantly—and unconditionally—calls upon the community of believers to make more and more good use of scientific facts, discoveries and formulae. Does the Qur'an not call upon the Muslims to make ready for their enemies the strength with which they can strike terror into them with a view to defending their lives and protecting their role on earth? And does this call not reflect a broad, flexible attitude that can be applied in every time and place, combining immediacy with universality and the temporary with the permanent?

> Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into [the hearts of] the enemies of Allah and your enemies (8 : 60).

Reference is made in this *āyāh* to absolute strength and steeds of war being the best weaponry at that time.

The Qur'anic chapter "The Iron" also stresses the need to make use of this mineral which is so crucial in the arenas of both peace and war, specifying, however, how it should be used or processed:

> We sent aforetime our messengers with Clear Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance [of Right and Wrong], that men may stand forth in justice. And **We sent down Iron, in which is [material for] mighty war, as well as many benefits for mankind.** That Allah may test who it is that will help, unseen, Him and His messengers. For Allah is full of Strength, Exalted in Might (57:25).

Could there be any greater proof of the Muslim's link with the earth

than the naming of a whole *sūrah* after one of its most important and crucial minerals? What could be a more convincing indication of approval than the above *āyāh* for applying science and technology, and developing the creative and civilizing tendencies that Islam makes an essential component of the behavior and ethics derived from faith, which a scientist must possess in his heart? Furthermore, this *āyāh* presents iron as a great blessing bestowed by Allah (SWT) on His servants. Yet at the same time it points to the two possible applications of iron: "material for mighty war" (when iron is used for making arms and military preparations), and "benefits" (which man can derive from this mineral in every area of his peaceful, constructive activities). What further need can there be to stress the growing importance of iron over the ages in matters of both peace and war? In our own age it has become one of the most important instruments for welfare or destructive purposes at the service of man. A modern power which possesses iron can indeed strike terror into its enemies, because of the heavy weaponry potential iron gives it. At the same time, it can join the ranks of the major industrialized countries for whom iron is the backbone of industry and wealth.

While dealing with iron, and as we have just come across a whole *sūrah* named after it, let us remember the *āyāt* from *Sūrat Saba'*, which mention Allah's blessing upon prophet Da'ud (AS) when He taught him how to soften iron. This was in the context of civilizational endeavor. Dhul-Qarnain is another example: addressing the oppressed, and seeking to protect them from a forthcoming invasion, he said:

> "[The power] in which my Lord had established me is better [than tribute]: help me therefore with strength [and labor]: I will erect a stronger barrier between you and them: Bring me blocks of iron". At length, when he had filled up the space between the two steep mountain-sides, he said: "Blow [with your bellows]". Then, when he had made it [red] as fire, he said: "Bring me, that I may pour over it, molten copper". Thus were they made powerless to scale it or to dig through it (18 : 95-97).

The Qur'an draws a unique picture of the harmony between man, nature and the supernatural. It portrays the balance between the subjection—and conversion—of material forces to the service of man and the worship of Allah (SWT). It shows the extraordinary contrast

between the aesthetic, and practical aspects of nature. It also shows a clear counterpoise between man's strength and practical potential on the one hand, and his position in relation to the rest of existence, his weakness and his perpetual need for Allah (SWT) on the other. There is a constant Qur'anic reminder of the need to guard man's capability from the tendency to stray from the fulfilment of his material and natural needs:

> We bestowed Grace aforetime on Da'ud from Ourselves: "O you Mountains! Sing you back the praises of Allah with him! And you birds [also]!" And We made the iron soft for him, [commanding], "Make you coats of mail, balancing well the rings of chain armour, and work you righteousness; for be sure I see [clearly] all that you do." And to Sulaiman We made the wind [obedient]; Its early morning [stride] was a month's [journey], and its evening [stride] was a month's [journey]; and We made a font of molten brass to flow for him; and there were Jinns that worked in front of him, by the leave of his Lord, and if any of them turned aside from Our command, We made him taste of the penalty of the blazing fire. They worked for him as he desired, [making] arches, images, basins as large as reservoirs, and [cooking] cauldrons fixed [in their places]: "Work you, Sons of Da'ud, with thanks! But few of My servants are grateful!" Then, when We decreed [Sulaiman's] death, nothing showed them his death except a little worm of the earth, which kept [slowly] gnawing away at his staff: So when he fell down, the Jinns saw plainly that if they had known the Unseen, they would not have tarried in the humiliating Penalty [of their task] (34 : 10 -14)

In another *sūrah* one reads:

> He said: "O my Lord! Forgive me and grant me a Kingdom which, [it may be], suits not another after me: For You are the Grantor of Bounties [without measure]". Then We subjected the wind to his power, to flow gently to his order, whithersoever he willed,—as also the evil ones, [including] every kind of builder and diver—, as also others bound together in fetters. "Such are Our Bounties: Whether you bestow them [on others] or withhold them, no account will be asked" (38 : 35-39)

The Qur'an goes on to state:

> To each We gave Judgment and Knowledge; it was Our power that made the hills and the birds celebrate Our praises with Da'ud. It was We Who did [all these things]. It was We Who taught him the making of coats of mail for your benefit, to guard you from each other's violence. Will you then be grateful? [It was Our power that made] the violent, [unruly] Wind flow [tamely] for Sulaiman, to his order, to the land which We had blessed; for We do know all things. And of the evil ones were some who dived for him, and did other work besides; and it was We Who guarded them (21 : 79-82)

These *āyāt* are but a few among many examples which demonstrate the supreme civilizational integration between man, nature and the powers of the Unseen, as they interact creatively in response to Allah's will. Here the cosmic energies operate in ordained harmony for the service of man who turns to Allah (SWT) in all his actions in worship, praise and gratitude for all these bounties so that he deserves the status for the sake of which life on earth was brought into existence:

> I have only created Jinn and men, that they may serve Me. No Sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me (51 : 56-57).

Here we meet two of the chosen servants of Allah—prophets Da'ud and Sulaiman. The vast powers of nature were made subservient to them as were the energies of the Unseen which no time limit or place-barrier can confine, and before which science ultimately shows impotence. All these powers—iron, the wind, molten brass, the jinn—were made subservient so that they can function at the command of the responsible, God-conscious man and help him fulfil his civilizational purpose by developing industry and the arts. We can see in these Qur'anic stories clear references to iron and brass that are manifestly applicable to us today, in the twentieth century, and are vital for modern civilization, or indeed any civilization wishing to build, industrialize and excel in everything. We can also see that Allah (SWT) did not merely give prophet Da'ud iron; He also taught him how to soften it and make its use possible. Moreover, One should not forget the reference to the wind which geographical research has shown to be a crucial factor in developing and destroying life on earth.

These *āyāt*—among many others—provide us with a decisive answer to those who allege that the only function of the Divine religions is to lead their followers into a state of isolation and passivity, and persuade them that the world is an archway to be merely passed through rather than developed. For these people religion is 'the antithesis of civilization' and faith is 'an obstacle to creativity, invention and innovation'; they contend that the relationship between man and his Creator (SWT) leads to inertia, and claim that only the positivist schools have a dynamic role in developing and improving life. This concept is totally unacceptable.

In this study, but few of the hundreds of examples were given which prove that the Qur'an totally rejects defeatism and passivity, a behavior conducive to making religion and progress implacable enemies. Indeed, to be God-conscious does not mean to withdraw from the usual processes of life, nor to perform deeds which are utterly devoid of utilitarian value. The whole matter of religion from the Islamic point of view is to enhance the very quality of the practices of living. On this account, Islam remains embedded in the very processes of life and history.

Notes

1. *Subhānahu wa Ta'āla*: May He be praised and may His transcendence be affirmed. Said when referring to Allah.

2. *Ṣalla Allāhu 'Alayhi was Sallam*: May the peace and blessings of Allah (SWT) be upon him; said whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, or whenever he is referred to as the Prophet of Allah (SWT).

3. *'Alayhi al Salām* or *'Alayhim al Salām*: Upon him/them be the blessings of Allah (SWT). Said whenever a prophet other than Muhammad (ṢAAS) is mentioned by name.

4. *Āyah* (pl. *Āyāt*): A verse from the Qur'an; a phenomenon pointing to the Creator.

5. *Faqīh* (pl. *fuqahā'*): A specialist in fiqh (see note 8). Also can be a synonym for *'ālim* (pl. *'ulamā'*) meaning Islamic scholar.

6. *Al nāsikh* (Abrogating): Those verses of the Qur'an whose contents have revoked a meaning in another verse, which is therefore called *al mansūkh* (abrogated).

7. Ben 'Ashūr, Shaikh Muhammad al Ṭāhar, *Tafsīr al Taḥrīr wa al Tanwīr*, al Dār al Tūnisiyyah, Tunis, 1984, pp 28-29.

8. Fiqh: Knowledge of Islam through its laws; science of the law of Islam. *Uṣūl al Fiqh*: Science of Islamic jurisprudence, or the methodology of deriving laws from the sources of Islamic laws and of establishing their juristic or constitutional validity.

9. Hadith (pl. *aḥādīth*): The verbalized form of tradition of the Prophet (ṢAAS) constitutive of his Sunnah. Also a collective term for all the *aḥādīth*. With capital H it applies to the sciences dealing with the Prophet's tradition in all its aspects. The scholars of hadith are called *muḥaddithūn*.

10. Ben 'Ashūr, op. cit, p. 12.

11. *Uṣūliyūn*: Derogatorily rendered as "fundamentalists" and wrongly as "puritans", the correct word is "purists" as it refers to those who insist on adhering to the traditional interpretations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and thus are not prone to engage in ijtihad (see note 16).

12. Ben 'Ashūr, op. cit, p. 44.

13. *Tawḥīd*: Unization of God—the act of affirming that Allah (SWT) is the One, the absolute, transcendent Creator, the Lord and Master of all that is. *Tawḥid* is the essence of Islam.

14. Sunnah: The path and example of the Prophet (ṢAAS), consisting of all that he said, did, approved of or condemned.

15. "Methods of Understanding the Qur'an", IIIT, Herndon, Virginia, 1991.

16. Ijtihad: Considering that the accepted juridical sources of Islam are valid for all times and places, ijtihad may be described as a creative but disciplined intellectual effort to derive legal rulings from those sources while taking into consideration the variables imposed by the fluctuating circumstances of Muslim society.

17. Imam (pl. *a'immah*): Community leader in religious as well as in lay matters deriving his legitimacy from commitment to and knowledge of Islam. Also interpreter of Islamic law.

18. *Muḥaddithūn*: See note 9.

19. *Sanad*: (pl. *Asānīd*): Chain of reporters who transmitted a specific hadith or tradition. *Al Musnad*: Any collection of *ahādīth* in which they are arranged according to the reporters who related them—e.g., *Musnad* Abu Dāwūd.

20. *Mujtahidūn*: See note 16.

21. *Āḥād*: Those *aḥādīth* based on the testimony of one narrator only.

22. Fatwah (pl. *Fatāwā*): A juristic opinion given by a *'ālim, mufti*, or *mujtahid* on any matter pertinent to Islamic law.

23. Published by Dar al Shurūq in Cairo and Beirut.

24. *Sīrah*: Biography of the Prophet (ṢAAS).

25. Within its policy of directing research on the Sunnah towards a correct understanding of it, the Institute held an international seminar in cooperation with the Royal Society for the Study of Islamic Civilzation, based in Amman. **The Prophet's Sunnah: Its Methods for Building Knowledge and Civilization**, was held in November 1989 during the seventh General Conference of the

Society and was attended by 126 scholars, professors and researchers. Among the most important items discussed in the seminar were Shaikh al Ghazāli's and Dr al Qaradāwi's two published books on the Sunnah (earlier mentioned) as well as other papers written for the seminar.

26. These issues were discussed in my book *Al 'Ilm Fi Muwājahat al Māddiyah* (Science Face to Face with Materialism), Beirut, Mu'assasat al Risalah, 1986.

27. For further details, refer to my book *Madkhal ila Mawqif al Qur'an al Karīm min al 'Ilm* (Introduction to the Qur'an's Attitude Towards Science), Beirut, Mu'assasat al Risalah, 1983. Here the reader will also find full Qur'anic textual evidence—subject by subject.

28. *Khilāfah*: The institution of man as vicegerent of Allah (SWT); the institution of government as continuation of the worldly government of the Prophet (ṢAAS). *Khalīfah* (pl. *Khulafā'*): Vicegerent of Allah (SWT) in space-time.

29. *Imān*: The conviction, or certainty, that Allah (SWT) is indeed the One and only God and that Muhammad is His last Prophet.

30. *Dīn*: The normative or perfect religion which Allah (SWT) ordained for mankind and which includes faith, ethics, law, devotion, institutions and judgement.

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Al Ijtihad wa al Taqlīd fi al Islam [Legal Reasoning and Imitation in Islam].

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